



Mad Cow

Interior designer Paul Hecker embraced the Palm Springs modernist aesthetic when conceptualising Mad Cow, the signature restaurant of Sydney’s Ivy complex

“**W**e spent three years putting together the design phase of the Ivy before the construction started in 2003. It took about two years to complete. The team was made up of Nik Karalis, the architect and director of Woods Bagot; Steve Cornwell, director of Cornwell who worked on the graphics and branding; and my firm—myself, Hamish [Guthrie] and former co-director Kerry Phelan. Since we’re based in Melbourne, I was up there every week during the construction period.

“Then there was the client, Justin Hemmes from Merivale. We had worked with him previously on the Establishment [Hotel]. One of his desires for Mad Cow was to create the feeling of an oasis in the middle of the city. He wanted to get away from grey drab and make it a place that’s fresh and light and bright. We spoke to Justin about influences and the ‘Palm Springs Modern’ style was a strong inspiration. It seemed appropriate for the climate—the shutters, the dappled light, the big windows and screens that open to let in the air.

“On top of this, we introduced the garden element. We worked closely with Daniel Baffsky [of 360° Landscape Architects, www.360.net.au]. Despite the name of the complex, ivy is probably the most difficult thing to grow. So we chose ferns of various intensities; they’re friendly and soft to touch.

“Throughout the Ivy, there is a recurring theme of concrete with a colour palette of black, white and either yellow or turquoise accents in different rooms. In Mad Cow, the white pendants with the yellow and green flowers were specifically designed.

“The yellow banquettes and most of the furniture are bespoke, with a garden furniture aesthetic. We also introduced some items of the period, such as the ‘Bertoia’ bar stools [for Knoll, available at dedece.com], as well as Gebrüder Thonet chairs [www.thonet.com.au] at some of the tables. These are a really beautiful yet slightly different version of the classic Thonet chairs—the most organic and fluid of all its range.

“There’s a separate bar in Calacatta marble that services the main dining room. The kitchen is located very close to the restaurant so the waitstaff can move from table to

kitchen easily. That was essential since the restaurant can seat 100 patrons.

“When a client is planning a restaurant, I ask them what they want to feel in the space. I think so many restaurants spend a fortune on fit-out without really asking the question about how they want patrons to feel. We need to work that out before even talking about aesthetics. While I believe that interiors are incredibly important, when you go to a restaurant it’s food and service that are number one. It’s the experience at the table that really counts.” ○

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